



Newbubbles
the education marketplace



The FE Toolkit: A Magazine for Grade 1 Teachers

QUESTIONING SKILLS

SPECIAL FEATURES

ASSESSMENT CORNER	1
NATIONAL CONFERENCE	2
QUESTION TYPES	3
QUESTIONING – 8 GOLDEN RULES	4
FACILITATING DISCUSSIONS	6
TACTICS FOR 'DON'T KNOW'	8

FACTS

Teachers ask up to two questions every minute, up to 400 in a day, around 70,000 a year, or two to three million in the course of a career.

Questioning accounts for up to a third of all teaching time, second only to the time devoted to explanation.

A large proportion of these (30-60%) are procedural NOT learning based i.e. they tend to be of the is-your-name-on-it? or have-you-finished-yet? variety.

Unlocking Learning

“Good learning starts with questions, not answers”

Professor Guy Claxton, 2007



“Questions are like keys that can unlock the human mind. The art of questioning is finding the right key for the right learner at the right time. Many of these keys will ultimately prove unsuccessful, but good teachers never give up searching!”

(Tully, 2012, The FE Animal, Unpublished)

Assessment Corner

Simple ways to test learning

POST-IT NOTES

The post it note provides a simple method for placing learner questions on a wall. The post-its are moveable and flexible, allowing students to group by theme, issue or category. Good at starts and ends of lessons. Excellent for kicking off recaps, illuminating student difficulties or getting students to answer their own questions.



OUR NATIONAL CONFERENCE IS COMING...

THE BIG FE CONVERSATION IS COMING TO THE SOUTH...

Will FE be another victim of austerity, or is this a chance to plan a new type of future?



The charismatic Michael Portillo offers a radical message for FE leaders and teachers.

Keynote Speaker:

Michael Portillo 22 March 2013

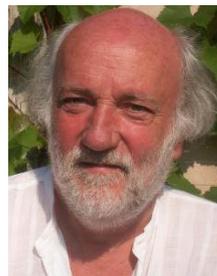
A new common inspection framework and important debates about the quality of teaching, FE management and teacher professionalism are changing the way teachers and learners think about the purpose of post-compulsory education.

Former Cabinet Minister and successful broadcaster Michael Portillo challenges delegates to consider a different type of future for Further Education.

A DEBATE BETWEEN POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Why doesn't OFSTED believe Further Education is good enough?

A rare opportunity to see experts Geoff Petty and Professor Frank Coffield debate the value of graded observations with OFSTED Director, Matthew Coffey.



Geoff Petty
Training Expert



Dan Taubman (far left), National UCU FE Representative and Lynn Sedgemore (left), CEO of the 157 Group discuss the impact of recent changes to funding and Coalition policy on FE leaders and teachers.

Date & Venue: 22 March 2013
Mandaly Hotel & Conference Centre,
36 - 40 London Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 2AE.

Delegate Rate: £269.00 (exc VAT)

E-mail your booking to gradeonetraining@newbubbles.com



IfL vs AoC?



Toni Fazaeli
Institute for Learning

With the recent announcement of the closure of LSIS in August 2013 and the 'downgraded' role for the Institute for Learning, Toni Fazaeli, CEO of the IfL reviews the impact of these developments with AoC policy chief, Joy Mercer, in a wider panel debate about the AoC's future role as the custodian of teacher professionalism and quality improvement.

Workshop Titles

- Are Lesson Observations Missing the Point?**
- Creating a Professional Development Culture.**
- Planning to be Outstanding: Principles Not Paperwork.**
- Teacher Learning Communities**
- Is Cinderella Back in Fashion? Implications of Government Policy for the Professionalisation of FE Teachers.**
- Moving Students to Higher Levels of Thinking**
- Creating Organisational Well-Being**

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONING

Good questioning leads to more effective learning—and more enjoyable teaching—than explanation alone. Questions can:

- Help learners reflect on information and commit it to memory.
- Develop learners’ thinking skills.
- Encourage discussion and stimulate new ideas.
- Help the teacher check the learner’s understanding and readiness to engage with new material at the right level.
- Provide a useful controlling device for managing classroom behaviour by keeping learners actively engaged and attentive.

(Adapted from TES, 4 July 2003)

SOCRATIC QUESTIONING—SIX QUESTION TYPES

When Socrates (470-399 BC) defined teaching as "the art of asking questions", he was describing a process of **critical thinking** normally associated with philosophical debates. Socrates identified six different types of questions which can extend learner’s **higher-order thinking**:

1. Questions for clarification	Why do you think that? What do you mean by? Could you explain what you mean?
2. Questions that probe assumptions	Can you give me an example of that? What do others think? Why do you assume that?
3. Questions that probe reasons and evidence	What is your evidence? Why do you think this is true? How do we know this?
4. Questions about viewpoints and perspectives	What would be the alternative? What are the strengths and weaknesses? Are you saying..?.
5. Questions that probe implications and consequences	How could we test this? What would happen if...? Why is this important?
6. Questions about questions	Is this the right question to ask? What am I trying to say? How could I re-phrase this question?

Example:

Teacher: *What is happening to our global climate?* (PROBING ASSUMPTIONS)

Student 1: It’s getting warmer.

Teacher: *How do you know it’s getting warmer? What evidence do you have to support your answer?* (PROBING REASONS/EVIDENCE)

Student 1: It’s in the news all of the time. They are always saying that it’s not as cold as it used to be. We have all of these record heat days.

Teacher: Has anyone else heard of this kind of news? (PROBING ASSUMPTIONS)

Student 2: Yeah. I have read about it the newspaper. They call it global warming, I think.

Teacher: Are you saying that you learned about global warming from newscasters? Are you assuming they know that global warming is occurring? (VIEWPOINTS)

Student 3: I heard it too. It’s terrible. The ice caps in the Arctic are melting. The animals are losing their homes. I think the newscasters hear it from the scientists that are studying the issue.

Teacher: If that is the case and the scientists are telling the newscasters, how do the scientists know? (PROBING IMPLICATIONS)

Closed Questions

A closed question can be answered with either a single word or a short phrase e.g. How old are you? Do you understand? The learner often gives a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.

When to Use:

- Testing learners’ factual knowledge e.g. What’s the capital of France?
- Easy for learners to answer (and useful for shy learners)
- Generate pace (when used in a ‘quick-fire’ whole-class teaching activity)
- Enable learners to be steered towards a desired course of action e.g. using a ‘forced-choice’ option such as: Are you going to do X or Y?
- Persuading a learner to adopt a certain attitude through the use of successive ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions e.g. *Are you happy with your current exam score? Are you doing 3 hours of reading every week? Would you like a better way of studying?*

Leading Questions

A leading question suggests an answer that the questioner desires.

Example 1: "You do hate paying taxes, correct?"
Your expected answer is insinuated in the question.

Example 2: "How late will your project be?" This question assumes the project will not be completed on time.

When to use: Use leading questions when you wish learners to take a desired course of action:

Example: Most people prefer to say ‘yes’ than ‘no’, so always phrase your question positively and with the desired outcome in mind – “Shall we approve X” is more likely to succeed than “Shall we approve X or not?”. Better still, keep it personal e.g. “would you like me to go ahead with X?” rather than “Shall I choose X?”.

Give the illusion of choice by giving the learner two options, both of which YOU are happy with. Most learners get caught up in the decision between the two choices on offer; very few will opt out and say ‘neither’.

EIGHT GOLDEN RULES FOR ASKING QUESTIONS

Tully (2012) provides **eight golden rules** for asking questions:

- 1. Leave the learner 'feeling good'** - always use questions as opportunities to boost the learner's confidence and self-esteem. This is the most important of all the rules because it will determine the extent to which learners will engage with your questions next time around. Think of *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*, and the learner's need for safety, security and trust. Some of the other rules feed into this No. 1 rule – keep this rule in mind every time you ask a question.
- 2. Devise a 'question plan' with potential answers** - this is essentially a list of core questions you intend to ask in the session. Keep questions specific – no ambiguity! Put these questions in the appropriate section of your lesson plan under the 'assessment' column, with some brief notes on the answers you expect (*see more on page 10*).
Example: You want to ask: *'what is the difference between a reptile and a mammal?'* Record this under 'assessment', then write: *'each learner will be able to identify two differences'*. You also write: *'Answers could include: warm vs cold-blooded, live birth vs egg laying, 180 vs 360 degree vision, scales vs fur, etc'*. Differentiation is achieved by including both 'pass' (lower-order, factual) questions and 'challenge' (higher-order, extended) questions. *Remember – a good lesson usually starts with a question!*
- 3. Set class rules** for the way questions will be managed and answered in your classroom e.g. Will you be using nominated questions which will put individual learners in the spotlight? Do you expect learners to put up their hands to answer a question? What kind of answers are you expecting from learners? Are learners expected to ask questions of you, or each other? Have you stated that getting the wrong answer is acceptable? Make sure your learners know how your questioning strategy will work and what is expected of them.
- 4. Allow thinking time** - the great educationalist Ted Wragg highlighted the need for teachers to stand back after asking a question to allow learners to think about the answer. *At least three seconds* is the rule, and sometimes longer if you require a more complex answer.
- 5. Aim for 'WHY' questions** - the deepest learning occurs when learners are able to relate the question to their prior learning and previous experience. 'WHY' questions force learners to go beyond a short, brief response to a more elaborated answer that requires them to explain, justify or give examples.
- 6. Everybody answers** - OFSTED makes a clear point of judging the quality of learning by the progress made by every learner in the classroom. Hoping for volunteers will ensure you miss out most learners! In any session, make sure that *everyone answers a question*— whether this is individually, in a pair, small group or team competition.
Nominated questions (to named students) should form a major part of your questioning plan – these keep students alert. Not everyone has to answer the same question (time might not allow for this), but avoid asking lots of questions that only get answered by a small handful of learners. Ask one question at a time, and allow learners to 'pass' on questions whilst ensuring you return to them with another question later in the session – answering questions should be a habit that all learners acquire! Use the last 10 minutes for a 'question round-up' which allows you to check learners who may not have been tested earlier in the session.
- 7. Rotate feedback:** If groups are giving feedback on posed questions, rotate the person that gives you feedback. Ask teams to choose their speakers, and have these shuffled each time feedback is required. From time to time, name the speaker you want to answer— this keeps everyone on their toes and improves learner participation.
- 8. Thank the learner for their answer** – if you want to encourage your learners to be more involved in a question & answer session, give them a good reason for doing this. Thank them for their answer *even if it is incorrect* e.g. *'thank you for that answer', 'good attempt', 'an interesting response but not the one I'm after'*. Smiling also goes a long way! Avoid short and sharp 'no's' if the answer is incorrect – blunt responses from you will produce blunter responses from your learners and will kill their involvement!

Open Questions

Open questions deliberately seek longer answers, and are the opposite of closed questions. Open questions usually begin with Why, How, Describe, Justify.

When to Use:

- Asking learners to think and reflect - asking learners to justify their response and explore their understanding of the subject matter e.g. Why does theory X offer a fuller account of Z than theory Y?
- Encouraging learners to share their opinions and feelings— useful for finding out more about learners' opinions, tastes, problems and perspectives e.g. Why is that important to you?
- For expressing interest in something that has happened to a learner e.g. How was your operation?
- Learners are invited to take control of the conversation.

HELPDESK

What if a learner is not making any sense at all?

Ask them to summarise their answer in a sentence

What if the learner is going on and on, has completely missed the point and you want them to stop talking?

"If I can hold you there, what I think you have said is ".....", thank you for that. I'm going to open this up to others for a response and if we have time, I'll bring you back in"

Loaded Questions

A loaded question implies some fact that has not been previously established. It offers an *assumption* with (usually) negative or controversial overtones.

Example 1: "Do you still take painkillers?" is a loaded question because it implies that you used to take painkillers.

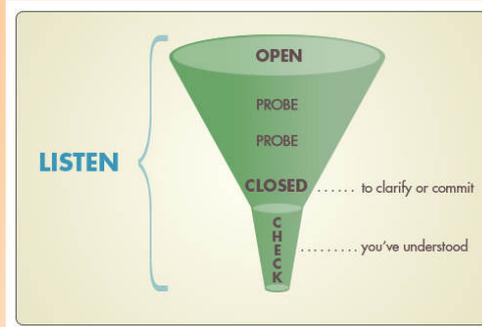
Example 2: "Should smacking, as part of good parental correction, be criminalised?"

The question supposes that smacking *could* be part of good parental correction, and thus the question is cleverly framed in favour of smacking and a 'no' answer.

FUNNEL TECHNIQUE - 'MINING FOR ANSWERS'

This technique involves starting with *general* questions, and then homing in on a point in each answer, and asking more and more detail (*probing questions*) at each level. It's often used by detectives taking a statement from a witness:

- * "How many people were involved in the fight?"
- * *About ten.*
- * "Were they kids or adults?"
- * *"Mostly kids."*
- * "What sort of ages were they?"
- * *"About fourteen or fifteen."*
- * "Were any of them wearing anything distinctive?"
- * *"Yes, several of them had red baseball caps on."*
- * "Can you remember if there was a logo on any of the caps?"
- * *"Now you come to mention it, yes, I remember seeing a big letter N."*



Example from Mindtools, 2012

Using this technique, the detective has helped the witness re-live the scene and to reveal important details about the incident. Teachers can use this technique in a number of ways:

- Getting to the bottom of a behaviour/ disciplinary incident.
- Locating the reason(s) in a tutorial session why a learner's performance or attitude has deteriorated recently.
- Steering students towards a specific answer required by an exam question or essay title (here you are essentially asking questions that allow learners to piece together the material needed to pass the assessment).

OFSTED ON QUESTIONING SKILLS

The following quotes are all from published OFSTED inspection reports for 'outstanding' colleges.

- *Students are expected to articulate answers to questions in some depth, and are gently discouraged from monosyllabic responses.*
- *There is skilful use of targeted question-and-answer techniques. This is characterised by frequent use of praise and encouragement to develop and extend understanding.*
- *Teachers demonstrate enthusiasm and high levels of technical knowledge. They successfully use questioning techniques to probe understanding, encourage exploration of issues and involve all students.*
- *Teachers make good use of probing and targeted questions to check and reinforce learning*

In less successful lessons:

- *Teachers fail to use question and answer techniques effectively to engage students.*
- *Too few demands are placed on students, and able students in particular are not challenged.*
- *Teachers accept brief answers from more able students and, consequently, they do not deepen their understanding or extend their thinking.*

Differentiation

Robert J Marzano, American researcher and author of '**Classroom Instruction That Works**' (2001) suggests:

"questions that require students to analyse information – frequently called higher order level questions – produce more learning than questions that simply require students to recall or recognise information – frequently referred to as lower-order questions".

Teachers are encouraged to try out the following:

- Ask students to elaborate on their answer e.g. can you justify your answer? What evidence supports what you've said? Who might disagree with this? Using descriptors suggested by Bloom's taxonomy is a good starting point.
- Ask the learner '*What Else?*' after they have given you a response, to force them to elaborate on their answer.
- Ask the group '*Who Else...?*' to require learners to build on a previous learner's response.
- Asking students whether they agree or disagree with a statement or previous student answer.
- Kathleen Cotton's (1988) American research notes that lower ability and younger learners respond more effectively to questions presented after they have been given the opportunity to look at material. With higher ability learners it's the other way round - asking questions before they have seen the material allows them to examine it with particular inquiries in mind, and elicits better responses.

USING QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS

Don't assume that discussions lead themselves. Good discussions have to be carefully crafted using interesting and imaginative questions that draw upon your learners' experiences.

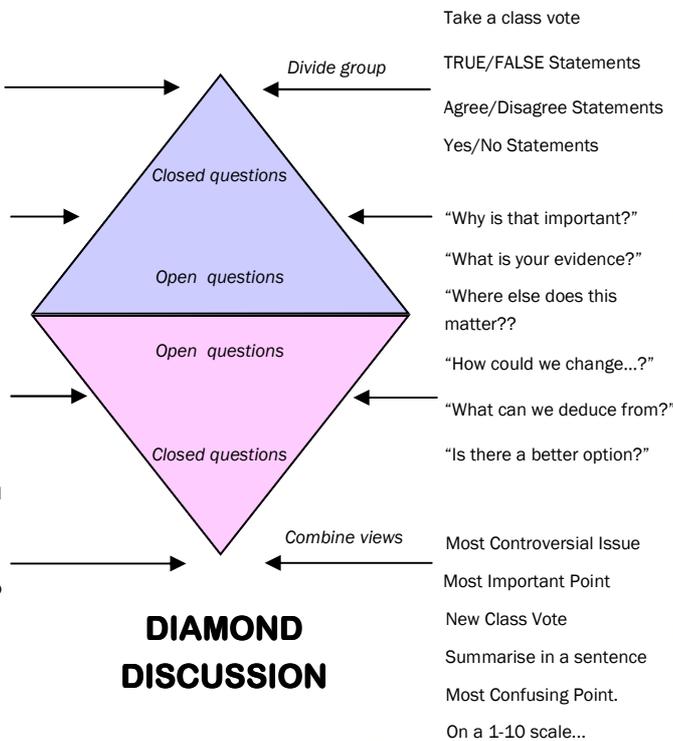
The 'Diamond Discussion' (Tully, 2012) is one way of representing the process of creating an effective discussion.

At the start, you need to pose a question that immediately draws your learners in. Closed questions are excellent devices for doing this.

The results of your closed questions can now be followed up with open questions, requiring students to explain, justify and give evidence for their own positions. Key points are written up on the wipeboard or flipchart and analysed for connections.

As individual views are elicited and personal experiences explored, learners are encouraged to see patterns (e.g. similarities and differences) between their different viewpoints, with a view to summarising the key learning points raised in the discussion.

Draw the discussion to a close by asking students to reflect on what was said and to identify what they learned from the exercise - even if it is only 3 or 4 points, this will provide a solid foundation for the next activity which may seek to explore the material in more detail.



DIAMOND DISCUSSION

At each stage of the discussion, the teacher will be playing a 'topping up' role (i.e. filling in any gaps in the learners' knowledge or understanding). Consequently it is wise to do some homework on the discussion topic! Your questions will be the vehicles through which the discussion is steered and will define the scope and focus of your discussion. It helps to have your key 'milestone questions' already prepared – these are your essential questions – just in case learners need a 'helping hand'.

ASSERTIVE QUESTIONING—IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT

Not all learners will be comfortable answering questions directly if asked, so assertive questioning is a good technique for getting learners into the habit of answering questions without being 'spotlighted'. Geoff Petty (2004) describes how to do this in the following way:

Assertive Questioning: Groups work on a thought provoking question. The teacher asks individuals to give their group's answer, and then asks the rest of the class to discuss and agree a 'class answer'. Only then does the teacher 'give away' the right answer.

Assertive questioning is to be contrasted with:

Buzz Groups (Volunteer): Learners work in small groups to answer a thought provoking question. The teacher asks each group in turn to contribute part of the answer. A volunteer answers for their group.

Buzz Groups (Nominated): Learners work in small groups to answer a thought provoking question. The teacher asks each group in turn to contribute part of the answer. The teacher nominates a learner in each group to answer for their group.

Studies of Questioning

More higher-order questions please!

A report by US educationalist Kathleen Cotton in 1988, which examined 37 research projects to do with questioning across the United States, came to two important conclusions. First, that at all ages, a combination of higher-order and lower-order questions was the most effective method. And second, that with learners of top primary or secondary school age, increasing the proportion of higher-order questions to around 50 per cent brought significant gains in terms of learner attitude and performance.

A 1989 study of secondary school lessons by Lincoln University's Professor Trevor Kerry found that only 4 per cent of questions were of a higher-order nature. Ten years ago, Ted Wragg's extensive research in primary schools produced similar results - only 8 per cent of questions were of a higher-order nature. "Because teachers ask so many questions each day, it's easy for one style of questioning to become habitual," he says. "And lower-order questions feel safest because they keep the lesson moving."

Studies in 1912, 1935 and 1970 showed that at least 60% teachers' questions simply required learners to recall information in the form in which it was presented. "This kind of questioning isn't teaching at all," argues Sue Jennings, head of initial teacher training at Exeter University. "You don't develop any thought processes - all you do is make those who don't know the answer feel like failures."

Steven Hastings, in TES 4 July 2003

TEACHING BY ASKING - GEOFF PETTY

'Teaching by Asking' is a rebranding of the 'Socratic method' by Geoff Petty as a way of making the technique of questioning more accessible to teachers.

Put simply, 'teaching by asking' is founded on the premise that teaching & learning is more effective when teachers use questions instead of lectures! Lessons based on 'teacher-talk' promote absorption rather than engagement, whereas questions promote insight and understanding.

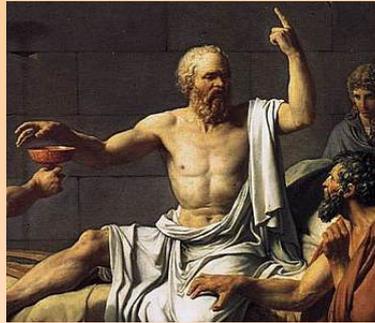
One of the defining characteristics of 'teaching by asking' is **using the student's existing knowledge and experiences** to 'puzzle-out' (*discover*) the answer to a question.

Example: (in *Teaching Today*, pp312-313)

Lets say the teacher has to teach the statement: for a circle of any size, the ratio of the circumference to the diameter is 3.14 (=pi)

Teaching by Asking: the teacher could ask learners to measure a selection of different-sized circles provided to them and suggest any patterns in their data.

In planning 'guided discovery' tasks of this kind, the teacher needs to: 1/ be aware of the essential background knowledge/ skills students already have (e.g. in the example, it is assumed that learners know what a circumference and diameter is); 2/ learners must be very clear what is expected of them (e.g. tasks need to be simple and ideally written down as well as verbally explained—not all learners have strong short-term memories!); and 3/ the majority of learners should be able to complete the activity successfully.



Socrates (470-399 BC), a renowned Greek philosopher, was finally put to death by drinking a hemlock poison for 'corrupting the youth'. Socrates was famous for using questions to highlight people's misunderstandings....the moral of the story is: don't ask too many difficult or 'personal' questions likely to infuriate your audience!

Incorrect Responses

Petty (2004) highlights the usefulness of 'leading learners' when they give wrong answers. This encourages learners to reason through their responses,, with the hope of self-correcting their mistakes before the teacher has to.

Example: driving instructor & learner.

- I: You started signalling too early. If you wanted to turn right, when should you start signalling?
- L: I thought I could signal at anytime...(shrugs)
- I: OK, let's explore that further... What would happen if you signalled right a mile from the turning?
- L: Other drivers might think I was going to make the turn very soon...
- I: That's right. If other drivers think you are turning, what might they do next?
- L: They might try and overtake me...
- I: That's correct. Would that be a problem?
- L: It might confuse other drivers I suppose...if they overtook, and I didn't turn, they might crash into me...
- I: Yes, that is a possibility. So when should you start signalling to avoid confusing other drivers?
- L: Just after the turning before...
- I: Excellent - that's correct!

All of these questions are designed to lead the learner through a process of reasoning that enables them to get to the correct response without the teacher giving away the answer. This process requires deeper thinking and is more likely to 'stamp in' the correct response the next time the learner is asked the question.

Quiet Learners

Ask a question and move to the vicinity where your quiet learners are sitting. Keep looking at them, smile, eyebrows raised...conveying an expectation that you want an answer from them. Usually, this will prompt an answer.

Other tactics can include:

- Breaking down the question into smaller bits
- Using a THINK-PAIR-SHARE method (see page 9).

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY— 'PASS' AND 'CHALLENGE'

The first three steps of Bloom's cognitive taxonomy tend to be the basis of pass standards on most courses whereas the higher skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation tend to reflect the criteria for higher grades/distinction .

Bloom's cognitive taxonomy			
Knowledge	To be able to state, repeat facts and information e.g. List, Name, Identify, Recall, State, Define, Match, Who	PASS Grades	LOWER-ORDER QUESTIONS
Comprehension	To be able to explain facts and information in context e.g. Explain, Describe, Summarise, Re-order		
Application	To be able to use and apply in new situations e.g. Demonstrate, Calculate, Use,		
Analysis	To be able to select and compare e.g. Distinguish, Categorise,	CHALLENGE Grades	HIGHER-ORDER QUESTIONS
Synthesis	To revise, summarise and extend e.g. Design, Devise, Produce, Construct		
Evaluation	To justify, criticise and articulate opinion Justify, Defend, Evaluate, Critique		

HANDLING 'DON'T KNOWS'

Students who respond with 'Don't Know' to a posed question can be handled positively in several ways:

PRAISE ALL ATTEMPTS TO ANSWER

Any learner that answers a question—whether the answer is correct or incorrect—should be *praised* for their response. Demonstrate to the class that learners who make the effort to answer will be rewarded - this will promote the value of asking questions and more learners will want to do it.

THE FORCED-CHOICE OFFER

After receiving a 'don't know', give the learner a choice of options that contain the answer—the learner is drawn into a response, which can then be followed up with a 'WHY' question that asks them to support their choice. If they can't support it, ask others in the class to confirm or challenge the answer.

USING PAIRS

Learners who make 'don't know' answers could automatically trigger a discussion in pairs to arrive at the correct answer.

PASS THE QUESTION

Ask the learner if they would like to have another go at the question or if they would like to pass it to someone else. Passing the question gives the student some 'thinking space' and doesn't embarrass them. Keep a tab on the number of PASSES that learners make; set a 'three passes only' rule if required.

Once a learner has chosen 'PASS', you can use one of two tactics:

1. Inform the learner that they will be asked a different question on the next turn, then ask for someone in the class to answer the original question — get the respondent to explain their answer then praise them. Go back to your original learner and ask them a new (possibly simpler) question.
2. Inform the learner that they will be asked the same question in a few minutes time. Till that time, they have to find out the answer (quietly) from one of their peers sitting nearby. Ask the learner now to explain the answer to the rest of the class.

RESORTING TO THE HANGMAN!

From time to time, it can be a useful and enjoyable interlude to tackle a 'don't know' with a hangman game that uses your target answer as the subject of the hangman. Works particularly well when you find most learners are in the 'don't know' category. Play the game with the 'don't knows' and use your 'knowing' learners to run the hangman. Keep it short and sweet for maximum effect.

TURNING FACTUAL INTO OPINION

Learners that cannot remember facts in class (e.g. names, dates, events etc) may simply have poor memory recall or perform poorly under the spotlight. Move them away from recall questions to questions that ask them to agree/disagree with a related statement. Asking the learner to use their past experience can be helpful in leading them to a correct or relevant answer.

MEMORY CUES

The human brain often needs triggers to retrieve the correct information from memory. The art of the teacher is to provide clues to the answer without giving it away. Even better, asking other students to add in further clues to help the respondent come to the correct answer.

UNDERPITCHING

Tully (2012) coined the term '*underpitching*' to refer to a teacher's need to change, rephrase or simplify an original question to increase the chances of the learner making a relevant response on the 2nd attempt. For example, the question: *What is intelligence?* is turned into: *Why are some students considered to be smarter than others at school?* The 2nd question now calls on the student's personal experiences, opinions & views and is more accessible than the 1st question. Underpitching can also take the form of multiple choice options, yes-no questions, true-false statements and simple diagrams— "*like building the foundations of a house, the purpose of underpitching is to gently lead the learner back to the answer of the original question, but this time on more solid footings..*"

Tully (2012) *The FE Animal*

Know Your Learners

Nominated questioning (or '*spotlighting*') is an excellent questioning tool and our golden rule No. 6 in this journal. However, before using this method, teachers need to gauge early on the confidence levels of each learner. Getting this wrong (i.e. by not considering the learner's confidence) can prove very costly to both teacher and learner.

Research by Ian Mitchell in Melbourne, Australia, shows that learners' main fear is not of being wrong, but of looking silly - saying something that will be ridiculed by the teacher or other students. Such "peer fear" is the main obstacle to learners answering and asking questions. Just asking easier questions to weaker learners in the hope they'll get something right doesn't seem to be the answer, as they increase the fear of being wrong. Mitchell's work suggests learners are most happy to venture their opinions when they believe no one else in the class knows the answers.

This last point highlights the need to capture relevant information about the learner's interests and ambitions at the start of the course.

'Student Questions'

Early on in a course, get learners to ask you and their fellow peers questions about the subject material. One suggested technique is to put the topic title or concept up on the wipeboard and ask learners in pairs or small groups to think of three questions they would like answered from the session. This exercise works particularly well on adult/professional courses where there may be specific knowledge or skill needs that learners are focused on achieving. Learners may also set each other tests and prizes given for the most creative question.

As Professor Guy Claxton states: "Asking good questions is the basis for becoming a successful learner...." "If [learners] aren't asking questions, they're being spoon-fed. That might be effective in terms of getting results, but it won't turn out curious, flexible learners suited to the 21st century."

TES 4 July 2003

QUESTIONING EXERCISES TO TRY OUT

Bradley Lightbody (2012) offers an exhaustive range of engaging questioning exercises in his newly revised book: *Outstanding Teaching & Learning 14-19, 2nd edition (pp240-245)*.

One Minute Paper: Place the class into pairs and give one minute to consider an answer to a key question or concept. Use a countdown timer to add pace. Gain answers and comment from each pair before confirming the answer(s) and build full understanding of the issue or concept. Discuss any wrong answers and why and how the wrong conclusion was reached.

Bronze, Silver, Gold: Place the class into pairs or small groups and have questions prepared on small colour coded cards. Bronze questions are worth one point, Silver two points and Gold questions three points. Each team selects which level of question to answer. Set a time limit or a points total and the team with the most points at the end of the time limit or first to hit the points total wins. For correct Gold answers perhaps offers a Gold coin as a reward available from any supermarket or for a real treat large gold coins available from Starbucks. For a special quiz attach ribbons to the gold coins and present to the winning team

Mini-Wipeboards: Issue mini whiteboards and invite each individual to write their answer on their whiteboard. Keep fast paced. This is good for questions that demand a one word answer or for multiple choice questions whereby they only have to indicate answer A, B, C etc. Throw in for fun a question where they have to draw the answer i.e an object, person, place.

Traffic Lights: Issue the students with coloured card in the traffic light colours and enter into fast paced question and answer. A student who is confident of the answer holds up green, a student who is unsure on some aspects holds up yellow/amber and a student who is totally stuck holds up red. Check the green answers by asking three or more students holding green for consistency and accuracy before confirming the answer is correct. Alternatively invite 'greens' to explain the answer to 'amber' and 'reds'. This can also work well in pairs or threes.

Connections: Connections is a questioning technique taken from the writings of Rudyard Kipling, *I keep six honest serving men. They taught me all I knew. Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who.* Display the six question roots on the board and apply to a topic to test and check understanding. You could experiment with a stimuli like the photograph of a key person, place, event, discovery etc and the class in pairs have to race to be the first to answer all six questions.

Snowball: Write around 10-12 single questions on individual sheets of A5 or A4 – one question per page. Crumple all the sheets together into a ball or snowball. Throw the snowball to a student who unwraps the outer page and has to answer the question. He or she then throws the snowball to another student and so on. You may place a sweet in the last sheet. For variation divide into two teams and throw the snowball between the teams. You may also have two colours of paper with challenge and pass level questions. If anyone is uncertain on an answer, open the question to other team members or the wider class.

The Tutorial 3:1 Ratio

When opening conversations, a good balance is around three closed questions to one open question. The closed questions start the conversation and summarize progress, whilst the open question gets the other person thinking and continuing to give you useful information.

Try This!

To encourage learners to ask questions, award questioners with a raffle ticket—the most tickets at the end of the lesson gets a prize!

Try This!

Think-Pair-Share activities pose a question to students that they must consider alone and then discuss with a neighbour before settling on a final answer. They can be shorter and longer exercises. A great motivator and promote higher-level thinking.

Pause Time

Most questions are answered in less than a second. That's the average time teachers allow between posing a question and accepting an answer, throwing it to someone else, or answering it themselves.

Research has found, however, that increasing the wait time improves the number and quality of the responses - three seconds for a lower-order question and more than 10 seconds for a higher-order question (Budd Rowe, 1978).

TES 4 July 2003

Tipping Points

In most contexts, reference to a 'tipping point' implies a negative behaviour – e.g. an angry outburst, the onset of a panic attack, a mental breakdown, a ship's capsizing point etc.

Tully (2012) suggests that every learner has a 'positive tipping point' - a stage when the learner starts to trust themselves and their teacher, and a point where they feel comfortable making contributions in class. *A cocktail of questions, smiles and praise is the key to getting to this tipping point, coupled with a little patience and perseverance.* Once the tipping point is reached, the learner loses their inhibition and starts to blossom.



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MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR INTELLECTUAL ASSETS

LESSON PLANNING FOR QUALITY MANAGERS

Lesson Plans need to have a stronger emphasis on assessment and progress under the new Common Inspection Framework 2012. This example, from a Hairdressing Level 2 session, offers a recommended approach to setting out questions used to assess a specific learning outcome:

Learning Outcome

Prepare Client for Hair Treatment

Student Activity

Learners will discuss the key information needs that a hairdresser requires prior to starting a hair treatment with a client. This is a small group exercise where learners will answer questions on the preparation process.

Assessment

Question & Answer:

Qu: List 3-5 items of information needed by a hairdresser prior to the start of a hair treatment?

Each group will be able to list a minimum of three items. Some groups may provide up to 5 items.

Answers will include reference to hair type, allergies, skin condition, client taste, cost & medical problems.

Assessment:
Questions listed.
Example answers recorded.

The example includes for only *one* question, but you could add more questions if appropriate to the learning outcome. Note the detail under 'assessment'.

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If you can offer a training specialism and your background is in further education, we would like to talk to you. E-mail us at gradeonetraining@newbubbles.com.

Thanks

Thanks are interesting, puzzling questions designed to get the brain juices working. They are particularly good at the start of sessions to 'warm up' learners, and make for excellent energisers just after lunch.

Some examples are:

1. Is there more future or past?
2. Is black a colour?
3. If I switch the lights off does the wall change colour?
4. Can you cast a shadow into a dark room?
5. In a dark room what does a mirror reflect?
6. Can you touch the wind?
7. Can you touch a rainbow?
8. Is a broken down car parked?
9. Is there more happiness or sadness in the world?
10. Can you feel happy and sad at the same time?
11. If I read a comic in a shop without paying for it is that stealing?
12. If I swap your pen for one exactly the same without telling you is that stealing?
13. If I pick up your pen by mistake and put it in my bag is it stealing?
14. If you ask me if I have your pen and I say no because I don't think I have, is that lying?
15. If we borrow every single book from a library is it still a library?
16. If we move the entire school and everything and everybody in it to Africa would it still be the same school?
17. If we took the school building and moved it to the other side of town but left the people and things exactly where they were where would the school be?

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Further Reading

The Little Book of Thanks,
Ian Gilbert (2008) Crown
House Publishing.

Next issue ...

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