

# How do I ask questions effectively in class?

## Module focus

- phrasing questions in class discussions
- encouraging student responses in class

## Module outcomes

- you will become familiar with a range of question types
- you will identify how you can structure a lesson around a series of questions
- you will become familiar with using a questioning technique which suits your teaching style and your students' needs

*'I ask questions but I don't seem to be able to generate worthwhile discussions. When I try to get a discussion going in class, the students are reluctant to contribute. I can ask a question and nobody responds. And when someone does offer an answer, it often seems to be quite short. Either this or one or two students always seem to dominate. It really becomes frustrating after a while.'*

### Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching? .....

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## Possible solutions

1. Prepare a class around a series of questions beginning with low level 'knowledge' type of questions and building up to more 'analysis' and 'evaluation' questions.
2. When designing questions before the class, try to design them in sets, so that when you ask the first question, and you manage to elicit a response from a student, ask a follow up question which requires the student to expand on or justify what they originally said.
3. By asking questions based on the students' own personal experiences and knowledge you will be much more likely to draw a response.
4. Build in enough 'wait time' between asking your question and getting a response from students - up to 20-25 seconds if necessary.
5. Use a series of overhead transparencies, each with an increasingly difficult question.
6. Use small groups in class to discuss a set of questions related to the topic, and including a progression through Bloom's cognitive domains. The class when brought together again will be better able to discuss the topic.
7. Try asking questions 'in the round', by giving each student in turn the opportunity to either respond or 'pass'.
8. Occasionally towards the end of a class, simply ask 'what did you learn from this activity' - build in 'wait time' though.

**Example:**

As you can see, the theory states that people are motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically.

- Q. Can someone give us an example of a time when they were really motivated?
- Q. And would you say that at that time, the motivation was more intrinsic or extrinsic?
- Q. And what has lead you to that opinion?
- Q. Is someone else willing to share their experiences in comparison to what 'X' has just said?

Often the first response from a student may be brief. Many times, the most important question(s) is the follow up question you ask to draw out an extended response.

**More help**

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. [http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2\\_learnch/small-group/sgt202.html](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2_learnch/small-group/sgt202.html) - discusses clearly why we ask questions and describes 3 types of questions - testing, clarifying and elaborating.
2. <http://facultyfiles.deanza.edu/gems/alvesdelimadiana/tuttech.doc> - some useful tips on how to phrase probing questions, from Deanza College, California.
3. [http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea\\_Paper\\_31.pdf](http://www.idea.ksu.edu/papers/Idea_Paper_31.pdf) - a detailed discussion of effective questioning techniques for the classroom, with useful examples from a range of disciplines (from Kansas State University).
4. <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/askquest.htm> - quite a detailed discussion of asking effective questions in class with some helpful examples.
5. <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/effquest.htm> - offers suggestions and guidelines for preparing planned questions which form the structure of a lesson.
6. [http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic\\_questions.htm](http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic_questions.htm) - a practical and useful discussion of the Socratic approach to questioning, including many examples of different question types.
7. <http://www.uwsp.edu/education/lwilson/learning/quest2.htm> - offers discussion and examples of five types of questions
8. <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/questype.htm> - relates question types to Bloom's taxonomy of learning domains.

**Alert !**

It is important to generate an environment where being wrong or not knowing an answer is OK. From the first class acknowledge all answers as contributing something to the discussion. It is also important that good answers and good discussion are acknowledged.