



EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING: PLANNING YOUR QUESTIONS

Effective questioning sessions in classroom require advance preparation. While some instructors may be skilled in extemporaneous questioning, many find that such questions have phrasing problems, are not organized in a logical sequence, or do not require students to use the desired thinking skills. Below are some steps and suggestions for planning questions.

1. Decide on your goal or purpose for asking questions. Your goal should help you determine what levels of questions you will ask.
2. Select the content for questioning. Choose material which you consider important rather than trivial. Students will study and learn based on the questions you ask. Do not mislead them by emphasizing less important material.
3. Phrase your questions carefully.
 - * Ask questions which require an extended response or at least a "content" answer. Avoid questions which can be answered "yes" or "no" unless you are going to follow with more questions to explore reasoning.
 - * Phrase your questions so that the task is clear to students. Questions such as "What about foreign affairs?" do not often lead to productive answers and discussion. "What did we say about chemical bonding?" is too general unless you are only seeking a review of any material the students remember.
 - * Be sure the questions allow enough flexibility so that students are not playing a guessing game. Avoid "guess what I am thinking" questions.

Example:

Instructor: What is a symptom of Multiple Sclerosis?

Student 1: Numbness.

Instructor: What else?

Student 2: Tingling.

Instructor: What else?

Student 3: Blurred vision.

Instructor: I'm thinking of a different one.

Student 4: Slurred speech.

Instructor: O. K., that's the one I was looking for. Let's go one from there....

- * Your questions should not contain the answers. Avoid implied response questions when you are genuinely seeking an answer from the class. A question such as "Don't we all agree that the author of the article

exaggerated the dangers of agent orange to strengthen his viewpoint?" will not encourage student response.

4. When planning your questions try to anticipate possible student responses. You might do this by considering:
 - * What are some typical misconceptions which might lead students to incorrect answers?
 - * Am I asking an open or closed question?
 - * What type of response do I expect from students, a definition? Example? Solution?
 - * Will I accept the answer in the student's language or am I expecting the textbook's words or my own terms?
 - * What will my strategy be for handling incorrect answers? (See Handling Student Responses for suggestions).
 - * What will I do if students do not answer? (See Handling Student Responses).

Anticipating student responses should help in your planning by forcing you to consider whether phrasing is accurate, whether questions focus on the goal you have in mind, and whether you have enough flexibility to allow students to express ideas in their own words.

5. Until you are quite skilled at classroom questioning you should write your main questions in advance. Arrange your list in some logical sequence (specific to general, lower level to higher level, a sequence related to content). Should you think of additional or better questions during the questioning process, you can be flexible and add those or substitute them for some of your planned questions. However, having a prepared list of questions will help to assure that you ask questions appropriate for your goals and representative of the important material.

Source: University of Illinois, <http://www.oir.uiuc.edu/did/materials/QUESTION/quest2.htm>