

Effective questioning techniques

The effectiveness of questioning in teacher-student interactions can be significantly enhanced by a few basic techniques:

1. Pose the question first, *before* asking a student to respond.

- When you call on a student before posing the question, the rest of the class is less likely to listen to the question, much less formulate a response.
- Posing the question before identifying someone to respond lets students know they will be held accountable and should be prepared to answer every question.

2. Allow plenty of “think time” by waiting at least 7-10 seconds before expecting students to respond.

- Ask students to refrain from responding until you ask for a volunteer or identify someone.
- Since most teachers wait only 1-3 seconds before expecting a response, the increased wait time can seem like an eternity and feel very uncomfortable at first.
- To help students adjust to an extended wait time, use the time to repeat and rephrase the question; also suggest that students use the time to write down the responses they compose.

3. Make sure you give all students the opportunity to respond rather than relying on volunteers.

- Create a system to help you keep track of who you call on, so you can ensure that all students have equal opportunities to contribute.
- If you call on a student who is not ready to respond or does not know the answer, allow the student to “pass” and then give him/her another opportunity later.

4. Hold students accountable by expecting, requiring and facilitating their participation and contributions.

- NEVER answer your own questions! If the students know you will give them the answers after a few seconds of silence anyway, what is their incentive?
- Do NOT accept “I don’t know” for an answer:
 - a. Allow additional think time, if necessary, by moving on and then coming back to the student for a response later;
 - b. Offer hints or suggestions to guide students in formulating quality responses;
 - c. If a student is unable or unwilling to formulate a response, then offer two or more options and let the student choose one.

5. Establish a safe atmosphere for risk taking by guiding students in the process of learning from their mistakes.

- ALWAYS “dignify” incorrect responses by saying something positive about students’ efforts; public embarrassment only confirms apprehensions about class participation.
- When students make mistakes, build their confidence and trust by asking follow-up questions to help them self-correct and achieve success.
- Admit your own mistakes and “think aloud” examples of a reflection process that demonstrates increased awareness, new insights, concept clarification etc.