

## Questioning Techniques: Types of Questions

“Teachers’ skill in questioning and in leading discussions is valuable for many instructional purposes, eliciting student reflection and challenging deeper student engagement” (Danielson, 1996, p. 92).

Unskilled questioning focuses on “rapid-fire, short-answer, low-level questions” as vehicles for checking students’ knowledge. Danielson calls this “‘recitation’ rather than ‘discussion’, because the questions are not true questions but rather a form of a quiz in which teachers elicit from students their knowledge on a particular topic. ...poor questions...are boring, comprehensible to only a few students, or narrow—the teacher has a single answer in mind even when choices are possible” (p. 92).

Skilled questioning engages students in a true exploration of content. When they are carefully crafted and framed, questions “enable students to reflect on their understanding and consider new possibilities.” Students are allowed “think time” before responses are expected and teachers often “probe a student’s answer, seeking clarification or elaboration through such questions as, ‘Could you give an example of...?’ or ‘Would you explain what you mean?’

Additionally, well-led classroom discussions are animated and they engage all students in important questions to extend, not just recall, knowledge. In well-run discussions, teachers serve as “guides on the side,” encouraging students to take center stage, comment on others’ responses and request further explanations; the teacher sets the stage, while students are expected to assume considerable responsibility for the depth and breadth of discussions. Everyone participates, not just the “few star students.” The teacher is not waiting for “the right answer.” Well-run discussions also encourage students to pose questions. Where this happens, teachers are encouraging students to develop critical and creative thinking skills and to engage in analytical thinking; students often engage more deeply and are more motivated to participate when they are encouraged to be the questioners. In this type of discussion, “the perspectives of *all* students are sought; *all* voices are heard.”

Even the best-planned and -run discussions may go off on an occasional tangent. To maintain a thought-provoking, focused discussion, the teacher needs to be able to find a respectful way to bring the group back to task without cutting off or putting down those who are off track.

Danielson’s “take” on the quality of questions, discussion techniques, and student participation from the perspective of the level of performance in the classroom follows (p. 94):

ELEMENT	LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE			
	UNSATISFACTORY	BASIC	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Quality of questions	Teacher’s questions are poor	Some of the teacher’s questions are low, some high quality; only some invite a response	Most questions are high quality. Adequate time “thought time” is available	Questions are uniformly high quality, with adequate “thought time” built in. Students formulate many questions.
Discussion techniques	Interaction between instructor and students is primarily “recitation” style; teacher mediates all questions and responses	Teacher makes some attempt to engage students in meaningful discussion, with uneven results	Classroom interaction represents true discussion, with teacher stepping, when appropriate, to the side	Students assume considerable responsibility for the success of the discussion, initiating topics and making unsolicited contributions
Student participation	Only a few students participate	Teacher attempts to engage all students, but with only limited success	Teacher successfully engages all students	Students themselves ensure that all voices are heard in the discussion

You may want to visit some or all of these Web sites:

- Article about the value of, types and techniques of questioning in the classroom: <http://www.fno.org/apr03/qtech.html>
- Research on the value of questioning in the classroom: <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu5.html>
- Introduction to Socratic Questioning: <http://okra.deltastate.edu/~bhayes/socratic.html>
- A Taxonomy of Socratic Questions: <http://www-ed.fnal.gov/trc/tutorial/taxonomy.html>
- Several types of questioning types are described in the article, “A Questioning Toolkit,” in the online periodical, **From Now On**: <http://www.fno.org/nov97/toolkit.html>

- Advanced Questioning Techniques (explains some of the types of questions):  
<http://www.businesspotential.com/adquest.htm>
- Examples of questions that help you frame discussions and evoke quality thinking are available here: <http://academic.pg.cc.md.us/~wpeirce/MCCCTR/questi~1.html>
- Web-based PowerPoint presentation on questioning techniques and types:  
<http://www.petech.ac.za/robert/questioning/>
- Levels and Types of Questions:  
<http://pigseye.kennesaw.edu/~rouyang/ece4473/q-techni.html>
- Questions for Teachers (with video clips — you may have to download QuickTime to view/hear the video clips):  
<http://www.deil.uiuc.edu/QuestioningTechniques/>
- Effective Techniques of Questioning:  
<http://www.hcc.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/effquest.htm>
- A wealth of links to various techniques:  
<http://www.instructordiploma.com/core/102B/questions.htm>
- Questions and the Role of Questioning Techniques in the Classroom:  
<http://www.instructordiploma.com/core/102%20B/jan.htm>
- Classroom questions for trainee teachers:  
<http://www.pgce.soton.ac.uk/it/cm/questioning/>