

EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS

Effective questions are the key to teaching for understanding. Students cannot be given understanding by the teacher, rather students develop understanding by comparing their previous experiences with what they currently know, feel, and are experiencing. So, fostering engagement through questions is essential in developing student understanding.

Effective questions produce thinking. Learning is the result of thinking. Therefore, questions are one of the most important tools used in teaching and learning.

All information was excerpted from the Well Developed Classroom Blog on ARIS Connect. For more information about effective questions, visit <https://www.arisnyc.org/connect/node/116827>.

Ideas taken from: 1. Morgan, N. & Saxton, J. (1997). Teaching Questioning and Learning. New York: Routledge. 2. Richhart, R. http://fromlithubart.com/Presentations_files/FULT_Learning%20to%20Questioning.pdf

Characteristics of an Effective Question:

- Engages our feelings as well as our thoughts
- Challenges existing thinking and encourages reflection
- Results in an answer that creates change – either in the listener or in the next events

- Expresses genuine curiosity; behind every question there must be an intention to find out
- Is a vehicle to clarify and make thinking visible
- Is supported by tone and non-verbal signals that demonstrate interest

- Is part of an on-going dialogue which involves relationships between speakers
- Is paced so that listening to the answer is necessary
- Has reason, focus, and clarity

Question Purpose

THERE REALLY AREN'T "GOOD" QUESTIONS OR "BAD" QUESTIONS. BUT, THERE ARE questions that accomplish the teacher's purpose. A communicated clear expectation for an answer is as important as the question. Students need to know when the teacher is using questions as part of classroom management and when the questions are part of learning. So, effective questions serve a particular purpose in a well developed classroom and are posed with an expectation of a specific type of thinking students will use in their response. Classroom questions can usually be divided into three general purposes, to: elicit information, build understanding, and encourage reflection. Within each purpose, questions can accomplish different goals or tasks. See the table below for examples.

Accomplish Specific Goals Or Tasks With Questions

THE PURPOSE OF QUESTIONS	
ELICIT INFORMATION	BUILD UNDERSTANDING
ENCOURAGE REFLECTION	

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE QUESTIONS	
CONFIRM Recall & clarify knowledge What comes next? Could you summarize? What do we know now?	PROBE Explore a topic Why do we remember ____? What is the best way to tackle this? What will this look like when it is finished?
DIRECT Establish expectations Can everyone see? Did someone get a different answer? Are you ready?	CONSTRUCT Build new understanding How could things change ____? What could this mean to ____?
SEEK Deepen understanding What patterns do you see? Can you compare ____ to ____? What are your questions now?	CONSIDER Assess from multiple perspectives What is the relationship between the parts & the whole? Who would care about this? Is this the whole story?
CONNECT Elicit prior experience What sort of ideas come to your mind when ____? What kinds of experiences lead people to act that way?	EXPRESS Promote learner's own thinking & understanding Can you put that in a way that ____ would understand?
	EVALUATE Challenge to think critically and creatively Was the goal achieved? How do you know? What changes would make this better?