



How To: Ask Questions

Why do professors need to ask questions in the classroom?

- To assess students' understanding of a topic
- To get students to think about an issue
- To invite students to participate in class discussion
- To confirm students' judgment towards a decision
- To probe understanding of students' perspectives
- To test achievement of a learning outcome
- To increase the activity and energy level in the classroom

What types of questions are there?

The general types of questions include the following:

- Open questions – these are questions that begin with who, what, when, where, why, and how. They are open-ended in nature to invite different possibilities and perspectives.
- Closed questions – these are questions that generate discrete responses, a “Yes” or “No”, or with very focused choices. Closed questions are useful when confirming responses and thoughts.
- Follow-up question – this question follows an earlier question. Reasons for follow-up questions may include to probe deeper for clarification or details of an earlier comment; to guide thinking towards a particular direction for the session; to funnel thoughts to reach a conclusion; or to seek other perspectives in a topic.

How do we apply the questions?

While asking questions will liven up the classroom, there must be a clear intent behind the questions you ask. Whether it is to assess learning or evoke an emotional response, educators traditionally align questions according to the learning outcomes of the session, (see How to Write Learning Outcomes).

Questions that are too abrupt or direct might not work. Especially with an audience that is not already familiar with the professor.

Below are some possible scenarios that professors can apply in the classroom:

Scenario	Possible questions and questioning techniques
To open a new topic/case discussion.	<p><u>Suggestion #1:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start with a closed question/poll directly relating to the topic/case. e.g., <i>Raise your hand if you would recommend that the company invests in the project.</i>• Follow up with an open question to gather the rationale and generate discussion. <hr/> <p><u>Suggestion #2:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start with a low barrier/general question that relates to the session topic. e.g., <i>What are some popular sports today?</i>• Follow up with a question to link the response to the lesson's topic. e.g., <i>Which of these sports are products of subtle marketing campaigns?</i>
To find out if an assignment was completed.	<p><u>Suggestions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct: <i>Did you complete the assignment?</i>• Indirect: <i>What is the case about?</i>• Indirect: <i>What are the challenges in the assignment?</i>
To assess learning.	<p><u>Suggestions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct: <i>What are the main learning points from the discussion we just had?</i>• Direct: <i>Which tool would you use to analyse the company's financial position?</i>• Indirect: <i>How would the concept be used in some work environments?</i>
To clarify or elaborate on a comment.	<p><u>Suggestions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct: <i>Could you please elaborate the point you just mentioned?</i>• Indirect: <i>How could the point be related to our discussion today?</i>
To hear students' opinions/to start discussion/to balance out extreme views.	<p><u>Suggestions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct: <i>Could anyone provide another perspective?</i>• Direct: <i>X, what do you think?/ I saw you shaking your head.</i>• Indirect: <i>What is another way to look at this issue?</i>

Important points to keep in mind when asking questions

- Keep questions short and simple. Stick to one idea per question. A question that involves too many things to think about will confuse students.
 - For example, “What are the different ways to solve this issue and what weaknesses does the easiest method have?” makes three demands on students’ minds. The first part is to list different ways to solve the issue. Next is to identify the easiest method and last is to identify the weaknesses of the easiest method. Breaking the question down into single-idea questions will elicit the most participation.
- After asking the question, pause (count five seconds) as students think of the response. Do not rush to fill in the silence. Do not always call on the students who raise their hand quickly, you might not get thorough answers. If there is no answer, rephrase the question.
- Ask questions in a positive manner, instead of a hostile or interrogative way, to create a safe environment for students to participate in the learning process.