

# Questioning Techniques



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## How to question students with 5 great techniques

There should only be two reasons why teachers question students in the classroom. Firstly, to cause students to think and respond, or to collect evidence to inform your teaching, so you know whether students have understood a concept or topic.

Why do most teachers ask students questions? To keep students interested or engaged. As in, I've been talking long enough, it's your turn. How do teachers generally pose these questions? By playing the "guess what's in my head" or "guess the answer I am thinking".

The teacher asks "what do we call the leader of Australia?" No not King. No not President but it does start with a P. No not Pauline. It's got the word Minister in it...so we are leading a student to the answer, but not allowing them to think. This type of question is based more on engagement and general interaction, rather than any real educational outcome. It is focused more on recall, rather than learning. There is no connection with the question or ability to show real knowledge. Students learn very quickly to either not respond and allow someone else to answer the question or yell out any word. New learning only occurs when you ask questions that require thinking.

What a teacher should focus on when deciding a question is whether or not it is a low order question or high order question. Then they need to decipher how that question will be asked, and how you would like the answer to be received.

## Wait Time—3 seconds minimum



Teachers struggle with waiting or pacing their lessons. We ask a question and want an immediate response. This doesn't allow for all students to comprehend the question, decide an appropriate answer, and then raise their hand to respond, especially if they have not been paying attention. On average a teacher will wait less than a second for a response, or shoot the question directed at someone they know wasn't listening and expect an immediate answer. This is totally disconnected from any type of learning.

**SLOW DOWN!!** Wait a minimum of 3 seconds. Allow students time to provide a quality response, rather than the first words that come into their heads. Nobody can think at the speeds we question, and therefore, nobody can learn.

## Football Questioning



Football (or Soccer for many here in Australia) is known for constant passing. Players pass the ball backward and forwards, trying to gain ground constantly. Football questioning is to be approached in the

same manner. Too many teachers focus on “Tennis Questioning” where they serve a student a question, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates that response. Change sides, choose another student, serve the question and evaluate their response. Even worse are the “Hammer Throw Questions” or the “I’m just going to throw this out there and hope it lands somewhere it will make an impact!” Football Questioning is where the teachers ask a student a question and then asks a second student to respond to that answer, and a third to respond to the second’s reply. The style of question can increase in order thinking, or simply expand on the topic further. It is also an excellent way to start a conversation or to gain an understanding of students depth of knowledge. Using questions like How? When? Why? How do you think about that? Are they missing something? Who else was involved?

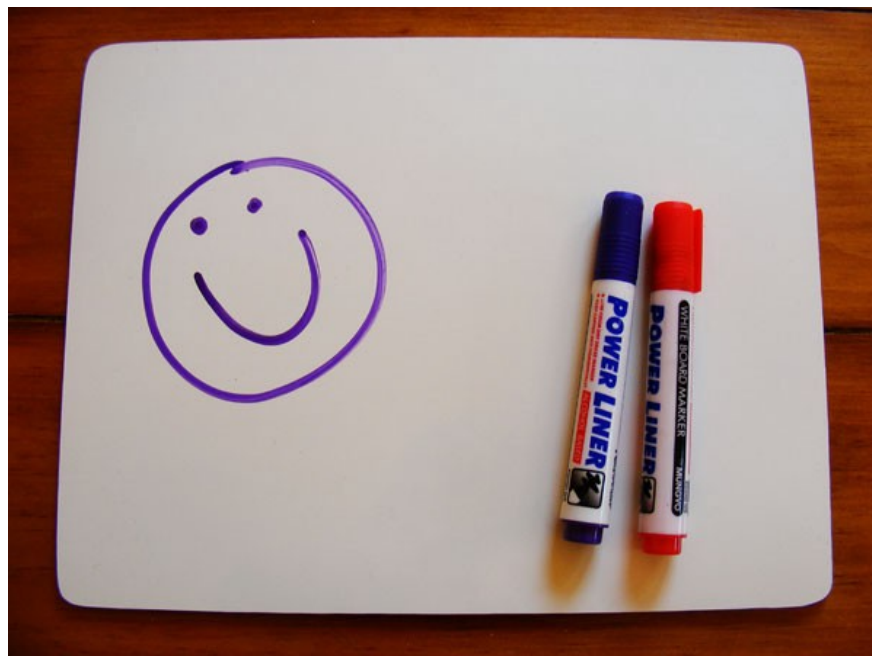
## No hands up



Participation in education, and your classroom should not be a choice, it should be obligatory. The latest research is suggesting that the student/s who are always answering questions and participating in class discussions are increasing their intelligence, whereas the students who choose not to, are stagnating. By allowing students to choose to participate, to answer questions and be involved, teachers are enabling the intelligence gap to widen. As a teacher, make sure that you alter who answers the questions. Each student should be asked to make at least one response during the lesson/topic/day. Linked with the Football questioning to ensure students are paying attention. “No hands up” stop the “hiding” student who never participates for fear of being

rejected or having the same student answer every question before the rest of the class have had a chance to think and respond.

## Mini Whiteboards



Mini whiteboards (or sheets of blank paper if your school doesn't have them) are an excellent tool for any type of questioning technique. Some schools have whiteboard rooms, where the walls are whiteboards; others have desks that can be written on. Any local Kmart or similar will sell small whiteboards for very little for those that are conscious of the budget, but they are well worth the expense! The teacher poses a question to the class, either verbally or written. Students write their response, and after a time limit, present their answer by showing the teacher their whiteboards at the same time. There is no winner, and there can be no blank boards. This technique offers the teacher a chance to see what all the students are thinking and whether a topic is understood. If more than half the class has a different answer than there needs to be further work undertaken to ensure all students are progressing.

## Post-it notes



They come in all different shapes and sizes, and, like the mini whiteboards, can be used in a variety of ways. One technique is to write the student's name on each Post-it note and draw a continuum on the whiteboard. One end could be Strongly Agree, the other Strongly Disagree, or Mortal and Immortal, Ethical or Not Ethical. The list is endless. Students are asked a question and place their Post-it note somewhere in the continuum. This can be done as a whole class, or individually. Choosing names randomly, those students need to justify their answer. Another option is to choose 6 students to place their name on the continuum and state their case for their response. All students must have a chance to offer their opinion. This then leads to an open discussion with the rest of the class, using the Football technique, No Hands and Wait Time. The notes can be kept and reused another day. It is also an excellent technique to use at the beginning of a topic and at the end to see if students have changed their mind on a topic or have developed their opinions further. Taking a before and after photo to compare on the last lesson is also of benefit.

Questioning is not simply about keeping students awake. It is a tool to discover how much a student, or class, has understood a topic or concept. Answering questions are often frightening for many students, who often hide or look away to avoid the situation. The above techniques are a great way to build positive student behaviours and encourage growth and empowerment of their learning.

What great techniques do you use in your classroom?

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