

Questioning approaches e.g. 'thinking time', the 'no hands' rule and 'phone a friend'



Strategy/approach	Process	Gains and benefits
Thinking Time: Consciously waiting for a pupil or class to think through an answer (before you break the silence) e.g 15-30secs	Provide time between setting the question and requiring an answer. Sometimes alerting pupils to the approach and the time available to develop an answer.	Prompts depth of thought and increases levels of challenge. Ensures all pupils have a view or opinion to share before an answer is sought.
Time Out: Time for thinking and talking	Time provided for thinking and talking partners, before seeking answers.	Pupils have thinking time, actively think and collaborate to form answers.
No Hands Questioning: Using the 'no hands up' rule Ref. AfL publication - Working Inside the Black Box.	Pupils aware that those required to give an answer, will be selected by the teacher. Teachers alert them to this as questions are asked. Linked to 'thinking time'.	Improves engagement and challenges all pupils to think. When linked to Thinking Time, pupils share ideas and 'position' their own views in relation to others.
Basketball questioning: Move questions and discussions between pupils	Teacher establishes movement of ideas and responses around the class. Builds on other pupils' ideas and comments. Accepts 'half-formed' ideas. NB not 'ping-pong'	Engages more pupils. Stops teacher being focus for all questioning. Develops connected thinking and development of ideas.
Conscripts and Volunteers: Using a planned mix of 'conscripts' and 'volunteers'	Teacher selects answers from those who volunteer an answer and an equal amount of those who do not.	Enhances engagement and challenge for all.
Phone a friend: Removes stress to enable those who cannot answer to participate	Those who cannot answer are allowed to nominate a fellow pupil to suggest an answer on their behalf, but they still have to provide their own answer, perhaps building on this.	Encourages whole-class listening and participation. Removes stress and builds self-esteem.
Hot-seating:	A pupil is placed in the 'hot-seat' to take several questions from the class and teacher.	Encourages listening for detail and provides challenge
Mantle of the expert:	A wears the cloak of the expert to answer questions from the class.	Builds self-esteem through opportunity to share detailed knowledge.
Preview: Previewing questions in advance	Questions are shared/displayed before being asked, or the start of the lesson.	Signals the big concepts and learning of the lesson
Pair rehearsal: of an answer or a question	Pairs of pupils are able to discuss and agree responses to questions together.	Encourages interaction, engagement and depth
Eavesdropping: Deploying specific targeted questions	Listen in to group discussions and target specific questions to groups and individuals.	Facilitates informed differentiation.
5Ws: Modeling simple exploratory questions to gather information	Teacher models the use of Who, What, Where, When and Why to set out a simple information gathering response based on the information provided.	Encourages students to rehearse enquiry and comprehension, can extend into reasoning and hypothesis. Creates an inquisitive disposition and a thinking or self reflective approach to learning.
Eavesdropping: Deploying specific targeted questions	Listen in to group discussions and use this to target specific questions to particular groups and individuals.	Facilitates informed differentiation as teachers use what they overhear to modify planning and further questioning.

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High Challenge: Phrasing questions carefully to concentrate on Bloom's Taxonomy higher challenge areas	Questions must be pre-planned, as very difficult to invent during a lesson. Focus questions to address analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creativity, based on Bloom's Taxonomy.	Provides high challenge thinking, requiring more careful thought, perhaps collaborative thinking and certainly longer more detailed answers. For Able, Gifted and Talented.
Staging or sequencing: questions with increasing levels of challenge	Increasing the level of challenge with each question, moving from low to higher-order questioning	Helps pupils to recognise the range of possible responses and to select appropriately.
Big questions: The setting of a substantial and thought provoking question	Big questions cannot be easily answered by students when the question is posed. They are often set at the beginning of the lesson and can only be answered by the end of the lesson, using all of the thinking based on all of the contributions to the lesson.	These questions develop deeper and more profound thinking. Big Questions are often moral issues or speculative questions such as, Where are we from? How big is the universe? What is the meaning of life? They require extended answers and usually rely on collaborative thinking and a personal interpretation of the information provided.
Focus questioning: This will help students to answer bigger questions	When students struggle to answer bigger or more complex questioning, the teacher can model or lead the thinking by asking Focus questions to lead the student through the steps of the thinking.	Develops confidence and the sequencing of small steps in thinking and response. Allows students to reveal the stages in their thinking.
Fat questions: Seeking a minimum answer	Pupils are not allowed to answer a question using less than e.g. 15 words or using a particular word or phrase. They must give an extended answer or make a complete sentence/phrase.	Develops speaking and reasoning skills, the correct use of critical and technical language. Fosters the phrasing of more extended or complex sentences containing the correct language or terms - Essential for examination preparation.
Skinny questions A traditional approach to Q&A asking everyday questions with a fixed or specific answer Linked to 'close' questioning	In its simplest form, students can answer yes or no to a skinny question, or give a number or knowledge based response.	Challenge level is low in skinny questions that do not seek and extended answer or reasons for the answer. Mostly knowledge and comprehension based. Does not develop thinking or reasoning.
Signal questions:	Providing signals to pupils about the kind of answer that would best fit the question being asked. Teacher responds to pupils attempt to answer, by signaling and guiding the answers.	The essence of purposeful questioning, moving pupils from existing knowledge or experience (often unsorted or unordered knowledge) to organized understanding, where patterns and meaning have been established.
Seek a partial answer:	In the context of asking difficult whole class questions, deliberately ask a pupil who will provide only a partly formed answer, to promote collective engagement.	Excellent for building understanding from pupil-based language. Can be used to lead into 'Basketball questioning'. Develops self-esteem, whilst moderating the level of risk.
Developing 'Key' Questions:	Teachers encourage students to identify their own essential or 'Key' questions that should be asked.	Encourages students to form and prioritise the most essential questions to be asked when analysing information.

Many of these questioning strategies and approaches are taken from the National Secondary Strategy for School Improvement, The 'Questioning' guidance from the Pedagogy and Practice Pack materials and the Assessment for Learning Handbook, or from the work of members of the AfL team including Paul Black and Christine Harrison at King's College, London.