

Home	What to ask questions about	When to ask questions	How to ask questions	Responding to answers	Workbook
<p><b>Home Introduction</b></p> <p>Getting started</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>What's in this toolkit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web-based guidance notes.</li> <li>• A downloadable workbook to use electronically or in hard copy. This can provide:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– an extension of the on-screen resource</li> <li>– a tool for reflective practice</li> <li>– a record of your professional development for your CPD portfolio</li> <li>– ideas that you can customise if you are planning CPD sessions for colleagues.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The toolkit provides a framework to help you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explore why, when and how to ask questions to promote learning</li> <li>• plan experiments in using different techniques and approaches</li> <li>• record the outcomes and reflect on what you will do differently next time.</li> </ul> <p>It aims to supplement existing resources on questioning available on QIA's Excellence Gateway, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving teaching and learning in business education</li> <li>• Improving learning in mathematics</li> <li>• Gold Dust resources</li> </ul>				

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Home Introduction	<p><b>Getting started</b></p> <p>Try this activity: <b>How can asking questions of learners help them to learn?</b></p> <p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>To explore your current understanding and practice.</p> <p><b>Method</b></p> <p>You can do this activity by yourself, but it will most probably be more interesting and insightful if you work with a colleague or a Subject Learning Coach (SLC).</p> <p><b>Step 1:</b> Ask yourself (and your colleague) the question: How can asking questions of learners help them to learn? Individually, write down as many answers as you can. Use the <b>workbook</b> if you wish (page 4).</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Compare your answers with those of your colleague and discuss what you have written.</p> <p><b>Step 3:</b> Compare your joint answers with the suggestions given.</p> <p><b>Step 4:</b> Make a note of what you would like to do more of.</p> <p><b>Step 5:</b> Reflect on the outcomes. Discuss them with your colleague or SLC. Prioritise those areas that you want to develop.</p>			

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<p><b>What to ask questions about</b></p> <p>Checking what learners know</p> <p>Finding out how learners are thinking</p> <p>Drawing on personal experiences</p> <p>Promoting the development of practical skills</p> <p>Encouraging reflection on the learning process</p>	<p><b>Checking what learners know</b></p> <p>How often do you use questions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning of a session, to check learners' prior knowledge?</li> <li>• During the session, for instance, to check whether learners have the particular piece of information that they need for an activity?</li> <li>• At the end of a session, to check what new factual knowledge they have acquired?</li> </ul> <p><b>Pause for thought</b></p> <p>Questioning to elicit factual knowledge has its uses. To what extent are your learners able to quote facts, formulas or rules without understanding how to apply them?</p> <p><b>Ideas to try</b></p> <p>Go to the <b>workbook</b> (page 7).</p>			

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<p><b>What to ask questions about</b></p> <p>Checking what learners know</p> <p>Assessment for learning</p> <p><b>Drawing on personal experiences</b></p> <p>Promoting the development of practical skills</p> <p>Encouraging reflection on the learning process</p>	<p><b>Drawing on personal experiences</b></p> <p>Personal life experiences can provide useful pegs on which to hang new learning. The more learners can make connections between what they do outside of formal learning and what you want to teach them in your sessions, the more easily they will assimilate new topics. Exploring their understanding of something they are already familiar with can be a powerful aid to learning.</p> <p><b>Ideas to try</b></p> <p>Go to the <b>workbook</b> (page 10).</p>			

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<b>What to ask questions about</b>	<b>Promoting the development of practical skills</b>			
Checking what learners know	Questions have an important role to play in helping learners develop practical skills.			
Assessment for learning	The aim of such questions is to make learners aware of crucial aspects of their performance. For example, you might ask questions like: 'What did you do to get to this point in the task?' 'What happened when you...?'			
Drawing on personal experiences	This approach can be more effective than simply giving learners instructions or telling them where they have done something right or wrong.			
<b>Promoting the development of practical skills</b>	<b>Ideas to try</b>			
Encouraging reflection on the learning process	Go to the <b>workbook</b> (page 12).			

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**What to ask questions about**

**When to ask questions**

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**When to ask questions**

At the start of a session and/or introducing a new topic  
 During a session or activity  
 After a session or activity

**At the start of a session and/or introducing a new topic**

There are many benefits to be gained from asking questions at the beginning of your session or when you introduce a new topic. Here are some of them.

Check understanding of material from an earlier session.

Stimulate learners to generate hypotheses by asking them “What do you think would happen if...?”

Engage learners’ attention by inviting them to share some experiences relevant to the topic.

Check that learners have done the required preparation.

Help learners to make connections between what they already know and what you want to teach them.

**Pause for thought**

What other reasons do you have when you use questions to introduce a new topic?

Go to the **workbook** (page 15).

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**When to ask questions During an activity**

At the start of a session and/or introducing a new topic

During an activity  
At the end of a session or activity

Once learners have settled in to an activity, what do you do?

- Leave them to get on with things by themselves?
- Walk around the group, praising learners who carry out your instructions and offering advice where you see things going off course?

How often do you use strategies like these?

- Do you silently assess (for your own purposes) whether learners are productively engaged in the task you have set them?
- Where you see that they are on top of their task, do you ask them to tell you how they got there?
- Where you see that they are struggling, do you ask questions that help them identify what they are finding difficult and why?

**Pause for thought**

Which of these strategies do you use least?  
Which will you plan to try out?

Go to the **workbook** (page 15).

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What to ask questions about

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When to ask questions

At the end of a session or activity

At the start of a session  
Introducing a new topic  
During an activity

An activity does not finish until you and your learners have debriefed. Some questions may be designed to consolidate learning, for instance:

At the end of a session or activity

- What are three things you will take away from the session?
- What did you learn that surprised you?

Other questions may help learners reflect on the process of learning, for instance:

- What really made you think?
- What did you find most difficult? Why?
- What helped you when things got tricky?
- How did working alone, in a pair or in a group help you to learn?

### Pause for thought

Think of a session you are planning to teach and about ways to prompt your learners to think about what they learned and how they learned it.

Go to the **workbook** (page 15).

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<p><b>How to ask questions</b>  <b>Open and closed questions</b></p> <p>Having a clear purpose          Planning questioning into a session          Involving the whole group          References</p>	<p><b>Open and closed questions</b></p> <p>Questions are often described as open or closed. This either/or approach is not always helpful because questions do not necessarily fit neatly into either category. You may find it more useful to think of questions as being somewhere along a continuum according to the response they are intended to elicit.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Closed</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Open</b></span></p> <hr style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"/> <table border="0" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 10px;"> <p>Question invites Yes or No answer.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Have you signed up for the workshop yet?</p> </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 10px;"> <p>Question invites a particular answer.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>What is Newton's second law of motion?</p> </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 10px;"> <p>Question is highly focused but gives respondent some choice about how to respond.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>How did you set up your project team?</p> </td> <td style="width: 25%; padding: 10px;"> <p>Question gives maximum choice about how to respond.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>What would you like to focus on today?</p> </td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Ideas to try</b></p> <p>Go to the <b>workbook</b> (page 17).</p>				<p>Question invites Yes or No answer.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Have you signed up for the workshop yet?</p>	<p>Question invites a particular answer.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>What is Newton's second law of motion?</p>	<p>Question is highly focused but gives respondent some choice about how to respond.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>How did you set up your project team?</p>	<p>Question gives maximum choice about how to respond.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>What would you like to focus on today?</p>
<p>Question invites Yes or No answer.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Have you signed up for the workshop yet?</p>	<p>Question invites a particular answer.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>What is Newton's second law of motion?</p>	<p>Question is highly focused but gives respondent some choice about how to respond.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>How did you set up your project team?</p>	<p>Question gives maximum choice about how to respond.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>What would you like to focus on today?</p>					

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<b>How to ask questions</b>	<b>Having a clear purpose</b>			
Open and closed questions	<b>Developing cognitive skills</b>			
	Effective questions can move learners towards deeper thinking and more profound understanding.			
<b>Having a clear purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this mean in practice?</li> <li>• A useful starting point is Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.</li> <li>• How can you use these examples in your sessions?</li> <li>•</li> </ul>			
Planning questioning into a session	<b>Learning conversations</b>			
Involving the whole group	Effective use of questions can stimulate productive learning conversations, while poor use of questions can stop such conversations developing. The learning conversation is a problem-solving opportunity where participants commit to finding a solution together. By using open questions to structure learning conversations we can avoid a situation where the discussion becomes all talk and no action.			
<b>References</b>	Find out more about <b>Learning conversations</b> in the pedagogy <b>Quick start guide</b> .			
	<b>Idea to try with colleagues</b>			
	Go to the <b>workbook</b> (page 17).			

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<p><b>How to ask questions</b></p> <p>Open and closed questions Having a clear purpose</p> <p><b>Planning questioning into a session</b></p> <p>Involving the whole group References</p>	<p><b>Planning questioning into a session</b></p> <p>Your use of questioning is more likely to be effective if you plan it in advance. It is especially useful to plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• questions you want to use at the very start of the session</li> <li>• questions that form the basis of activities</li> <li>• questions for use during de-briefs or plenary discussions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ideas to try</b></p> <p><b>Sequences of questions</b></p> <p>Effective questioning is more than asking a question and getting an answer. A strategy that can often be effective is to follow one question with another and then another.</p> <p><b>Ideas to try</b></p> <p>Go to the <b>workbook</b> (page 21).</p>			

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Open and closed questions

Having a clear purpose

Planning questioning into a session

**Involving the whole group**

References

**Involving the whole group**

Compare these two examples.

The teacher asks the group a question and selects one of several learners volunteering to answer. If the learner gives the answer that the teacher had in mind, the teacher says 'Yes, well done' and moves on. If the learner doesn't give the expected answer, the teacher says 'No. Can anyone else give me the answer?'

The teacher asks the group a question, pauses to let everyone consider their answer and then asks one learner for a response. Whether or not the response is the one expected, the teacher receives it with a polite 'Thank you' then asks another learner for their response and receives it in the same way. After several learners have responded, the teacher might ask: 'How can we decide which is the most accurate answer?'

Which example engages most learners? How and why does it work?

**Ideas to try**

**Go to the workbook (page 23).**

## Ideas to try

Ask pairs of learners to devise two questions for another pair to answer.

Have a 'no hands' rule. This means the teacher selects who will answer. Announce when the rule is in force.

Allow thinking time. Count to 10 before asking for answers.

Use mobile phones or SMS via PCs. Learners all have to text back an answer.

### **Getting everyone involved in answering questions**

Help less confident learners by providing them with an answering frame, for instance:  
"A good way to start your answer might be..."

Use aids such as mini whiteboards, sticky notes and traffic lights. The latter can simply be squares of paper in red, amber and green. When a learner answers a question, the others can use their traffic lights to show what they think of the answer, with red as disagree, green as agree and amber as not sure.

**How to ask questions**

Open and closed questions  
 Having a clear purpose  
 Planning questioning into a session  
 Involving the whole group

**References**

**References**

Bloom, B.S. (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain*. Longman. *Looking at Learning* CD-ROM

**Resources that explore questioning strategies**

DfES (2006) *Speaking and Listening Skills: A support pack for staff working with offenders*, Ref: S&L/PACK01.

DfES (2004) *Pedagogy and Practice: Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools. Unit 7: Questioning*, [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/sec\\_ppt10](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/sec_ppt10)

Gold Dust resources: *Questioning techniques*, [www.goldust.org.uk/questioning/questioning.html](http://www.goldust.org.uk/questioning/questioning.html)

Key Skills Support Programme (2007) *Teaching speaking and listening: a toolkit for practitioners*.

National Teaching and Learning Change Programme. *Improving learning in mathematics. CD-ROM 2 Exploring the approaches: Thinking about learning – thinking about discussion*, [http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/#math\\_learning\\_CDexploring2](http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/#math_learning_CDexploring2)

National Teaching and Learning Change Programme. *Improving differentiation in business education. CD-ROM 1: Questioning techniques*, [http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/#bus\\_different\\_CDcpd](http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/#bus_different_CDcpd)

National Teaching and Learning Change Programme. *Improving teaching, training and learning in Engineering. Resources CD-ROM. CPD Activity 6: Questioning for learning*, [http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/#engin\\_change\\_CDresources](http://teachingandlearning.qia.org.uk/#engin_change_CDresources)