

QUESTIONING TIPS: Tips and Tricks

Taken from Braus, Judy A. and Wood, David. 1993. *Environmental Education in the Schools Creating a Program that Works!* Washington DC, USA Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange.

Wait a Second: Wait at least three to five seconds after asking a question before calling on a student to respond. Also wait a few seconds after the student responds. This "double wait time" will give students more time to think, respond, and participate in questions and discussion.

Facilitate with Follow-Up Questions: Push students to go beyond their answers with probing question such as "Why? Do you agree? Can you elaborate? Tell me more. Can you give an example?"

Don't Judge: When a student answers a question, don't harshly evaluate by saying something like "You're wrong, Jerome." Instead, withhold negative judgment, positively acknowledge the response (nod head, ask whether anyone agrees or disagrees) and move the discussion along. As the discussion continues, the correct answer(s) will surface and be reinforced.

Summarize: Help students listen more carefully by asking questions like "Could you please summarize Robin's point about the connection between jobs and environmental issues?"

Survey: Get students involved by surveying the class: "How many people agree with the author's point about global climate change?"

Encourage Interaction: Encourage students to ask each other questions: "Philip, will you please call on someone else to respond?"

Pay Devil's Advocate: Encourage students to defend their reasoning by offering different points of view.

Don't rely on Raised Hands: Call on students randomly instead of favoring just those with raised hands.

Encourage "Thinking Aloud": Ask students to think about how they came up with a response: "Describe how you arrived at your answer."

Cue Student Responses: For example, say, "There is no one correct answer for the question. I want you to consider alternatives."

Think, Pair, Share: After asking a question, you can allow time for each person to think about the answer, then have students pair up for more discussion. Finally, have students share their thoughts with the entire group.

Encourage Action: Ask questions that lead to investigation or action, such as "What happens if you add baking soda to the soil?" How would you describe the texture of the bark?

A Questionable Environment: Add questions to displays, bulletin boards, and collections. Start a "Questions to Investigate" corner or a "Problem of the Week" competition.

Don't Answer That: Sometimes the best way to get students to think is to ask rhetorical questions, such as "I wonder what's under that log."

Write them Down: Many educators think about the questions they want to ask and jot them down before class. This triggers you to remember to ask stimulating questions. The more you practice, the easier it gets to ask questions that make students think.

Comparison of Closed and Open-Ended Questions

Characteristics of Closed Questions:

- Require a nonverbal response or a one or two word answer from children
- Tend to have right or wrong answers
- Are ones for which adults already know the answers
- Require a 'quick' response
- Focus on facts and similarity in thinking
- Ask for information
- Focus on labeling or naming
- Require the child to recall something from memory

Characteristics of Open-ended Questions:

- Promote multi-word, multi-phrase responses from children
- Have more than one correct answer
- Are ones for which adults don't know what children's answers might be
- Allow children time to formulate and collect their thoughts
- Focus on ideas and originality in thinking
- Ask for reasoning
- Focus on thinking and problem solving
- Require the child to use his or her imagination

Examples:

Closed Questions:

What shape is this?
How many cows did you see?
What street do you live on?
How are you?
Who brought you to school today?
Where is your knapsack?
Do you know what this is?

Open-ended Questions:

What do you think will happen next?
How else could we.....?
What is your idea?
How did you.....?
What would happen if.....?
What do you think about.....?
What do you suppose would explain.....?