

Many instructors use questions as a teaching strategy, but sometimes the question itself and how it's asked can end up working against the learning goals.



Think about the times you have asked a question in class... and there's just silence!

Silence could mean many things: students don't feel comfortable speaking in front of a group, need more time to process the question, don't know the answer, or more often than not, they don't understand what you're asking.

Here are a few helpful strategies for asking questions in thoughtful and productive ways.

01 | ► CONNECT QUESTIONS TO COURSE GOALS

Consider asking questions that help students practice both the skills they should be learning in the course *and* help convey the form and style of communication used within the discipline.

- Will they need to support statements with evidence on an exam?
- Will they need to turn a lot of information into a simple, plain language format that is easier to understand?
- Will they need to explain the steps they took to arrive at their answer?



02 | ► START WITH SPECIFIC QUESTIONS & BUILD UP TO MORE COMPLEX QUESTIONS

Think about whether your students are at the stage where they could reasonably tackle providing a layered response when asked a more complex question, or if perhaps taking a step back to break the question down would facilitate a better response.

Think about what the author of the assigned reading is trying to say here. What is the main idea? How does the evidence support what they're saying? How do they use the evidence and what kinds of evidence do they have? And is this effective at supporting that point or not, do you think, and how do you know?

VS.

1. Locate and paraphrase the main idea
2. Identify where the author provides evidence to support their point
3. Determine what types of evidence are used
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of each piece of evidence



03

WRITE DOWN & REFINE QUESTIONS AFTER CLASS

After each class, reflect on which questions were the most effective and which could be improved. Write down both the effective and ineffective and use your notes to modify questions for the next time you teach the course.

EXAMPLES

Did any questions lead students off-topic or in the wrong direction?

Did some questions get the response you were looking for?

04

GIVE STUDENTS TIME TO THINK AND FORMULATE RESPONSES

Extend the length of silence (3-5 seconds) after asking a question—it gives students more reflection and processing time and allows students to formulate a more thoughtful response. This additional 'think time' should lead to a greater variety of responses, with a greater diversity of students participating.



05

RESPOND IN A WAY THAT CONTINUES THE DIALOGUE

Keep asking questions that encourage other students to reflect and join the discussion. For example, ask a student to summarize what another student said and share whether they agree or disagree. Then, have them explain why they think that way.



06

THANK STUDENTS WHO RESPOND

Saying, "Thank you for engaging in our course discussion," at the end of class shows you appreciate their effort and participation, regardless of whether their answers were right or wrong.

